**Booker T. Washington/W.E.B. Du Bois Compare and Contrast Short Essay**

Directions: Read the section titled “Two Perspectives on African American Education” (P. 324-325) and the attached handout. After you have completed the reading, write a short essay (two paragraphs) that compares and contrasts the goals and beliefs Washington and Du Bois had for African Americans. Your essay should answer the following questions:

* Who was Booker T. Washington? What did he believe African Americans should focus on? According to Washington, what would be the key for blacks to earn white acceptance in society?
* Who was W.E.B. Du Bois? Why did he reject Washington’s beliefs? What did Du Bois believe African Americans should focus on instead? What organizations and movements did Du Bois participate in? According to Du Bois, what would be the key for blacks to earn white acceptance in society?

**Document A: Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois**

Two great leaders of the black community in the late 19th and 20th century were W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. However, they sharply disagreed on strategies for black social and economic progress. Their opposing philosophies can be found in much of today's discussions over how to end class and racial injustice, what is the role of black leadership, and what do the 'haves' owe the 'have-nots' in the black community.

Booker T. Washington, educator, reformer and the most influential black leader of his time (1856-1915) preached a philosophy of self-help, racial solidarity and accommodation. He urged blacks to accept discrimination for the time being and concentrate on elevating themselves through hard work and material prosperity. He believed in education in the crafts, industrial and farming skills and the cultivation of the virtues of patience, enterprise and thrift. This, he said, would win the respect of whites and lead to African Americans being fully accepted as citizens and integrated into all strata of society.

W.E.B. Du Bois, a towering black intellectual, scholar and political thinker (1868-1963) said no--Washington's strategy would serve only to perpetuate white oppression. Du Bois advocated political action and a civil rights agenda (he helped found the NAACP). In addition, he argued that social change could be accomplished by developing the small group of college-educated blacks he called "the Talented Tenth:"

**"The Negro Race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education then, among Negroes, must first of all deal with the "Talented Tenth." It is the problem of developing the best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the worst.**"

At the time, the Washington/Du Bois dispute polarized African American leaders into two wings--the 'conservative' supporters of Washington and his 'radical' critics. The Du Bois philosophy of agitation and protest for civil rights flowed directly into the Civil Rights movement which began to develop in the 1950's and exploded in the 1960's. Booker T. today is associated, perhaps unfairly, with the self-help/colorblind/Republican/Clarence Thomas/Thomas Sowell wing of the black community and its leaders. The Nation of Islam and Maulana Karenga's Afrocentrism derive too from this strand out of Booker T.'s philosophy. However, the latter advocated withdrawal from the mainstream in the name of economic advancement.

**Document B: Booker T. Washington (Modified)**

*Booker T. Washington was born a slave in 1856 and was nine years old when slavery ended. He became the principal of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, a school designed to teach blacks industrial skills. Washington was a skillful politician and speaker, and he won the support of whites in the North and South who donated money to the school. On September 18, 1895, Booker T. Washington spoke before a mostly white audience in Atlanta.*

Ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our freedom we began at the top instead of at the bottom; that a seat in Congress or the state legislature was more attractive than starting a dairy farm or garden.

A ship lost at sea for many days passed a friendly ship and sent out a signal, “Water, water; we die of thirst!” The answer from the friendly ship at once came back, “Cast down your bucket where you are.” A second time the signal, “Water, water; send us water!” ran up from the distressed ship, and was answered, “Cast down your bucket where you are” . . . .The captain of the distressed vessel (ship), at last heeding (listening to) the injunction (order), cast down his bucket, and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water.

To those of my race I would say: “Cast down your bucket where you are”— cast it down in making friends with the Southern white man, who is your next-door neighbor. Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service. . . . No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top.

To those of the white race who look to foreign immigrants for the prosperity of the South, I would repeat what I say to my own race, “Cast down your bucket where you are.” Cast it down among the eight millions of Negroes, whose fidelity (loyalty) and love you have tested. . . . As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past . . . so in the future, in our humble way, we shall stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach. . . . In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.

Source: Excerpt from Booker T. Washington’s ‘Atlanta Compromise’ speech, 1895.

**Document C: W.E.B. Du Bois (Modified)**

*The most influential public critique of Booker T. Washington came in 1903 when black leader and intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois published an essay in his book,* The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois rejected Washington’s message and instead called for political power, insistence on civil rights, and the higher education of African American youth. Du Bois was born and raised a free man in Massachusetts and was the first African American to earn a PhD from Harvard.*

The most striking thing in the history of the American Negro since 1876 is the rise of Mr. Booker T. Washington. His leadership began at the time when Civil War memories and ideals were rapidly passing; a day of astonishing commercial development was dawning; a sense of doubt and hesitation overtook the freedmen’s sons. Mr. Washington came at the psychological moment when whites were a little ashamed of having paid so much attention to Negroes [during Reconstruction], and were concentrating their energy on dollars.

Mr. Washington practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro races. Mr. Washington withdraws many of the high demands of Negroes as men and American citizens. He asks that black people give up, at least for the present, three things—

First, political power; Second, insistence on civil rights; Third, higher education of Negro youth,

— and concentrate all their energies on industrial education, the accumulation of wealth, and the pacifying (calming down) of the South. As a result of this tender of the palm-branch (peace offering), what has been the return? In these years there have occurred:

1. The disfranchisement (taking away the right to vote) of the Negro;

2. The legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro;

3. The steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro.

Mr. Washington’s doctrine has tended to make the whites, North and South, shift the burden of the Negro problem to the Negro’s shoulders and stand aside as critical spectators (onlookers); when in fact the burden belongs to the nation, and the hands of none of us are clean if we do not all work on righting these great wrongs.

Source: W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago, 1903).